



# When an Institutional Building Becomes a Water System

Hospitals, Schools, Colleges, Hotels, Convention Centers

331-488 • Revised 1/6/2020

## Your institution is a public water system, subject to state drinking water rules, if you:

- ◆ Install water treatment to treat the municipal water supplied to you.
- ◆ Construct your own emergency well, spring, or surface water supply and connect it, or intend to connect it, to your facility's plumbing.

## What should I do if my institution treats, or intends to treat, the water supplied to us?

You must follow applicable state drinking water rules because adding treatment defines your institution as a public water system. When you adjust the pH of the incoming municipal supply or add chemicals or compounds (such as chlorine, chlorine dioxide, a corrosion inhibitor, copper or silver ions), the water you produce could exceed a drinking water standard. To protect yourself as an owner and your building occupants, you must meet the obligations on Page 2.

Other forms of treatment also may require building owners to follow state drinking water rules. Call our headquarters office engineering staff if you have questions about your treatment.

## What should I do if my institution built, or intends to build, an emergency water source?

You may need to provide a continuous source of potable water if your normal supply from the municipal water system is interrupted. If you connected, or intend to connect, your building's plumbing system to an emergency water supply, such as a well, you must get state Department of Health approval.

Our approval process ensures the source will be safe to use when you need it. We will require you to develop an operational narrative describing the:

- ◆ Routine procedures you will follow to keep the emergency source safe and ready to use.
- ◆ Person authorized to decide when to reconnect and use the emergency source.
- ◆ Communication and sampling that occur before, or when, using the emergency source.
- ◆ Circumstances when you will connect the emergency source to the building plumbing and use the emergency source to supply potable water.

After we approve the emergency source, we consider the building water system **inactive** as long as you maintain a physical separation between the emergency source and the building plumbing. The owner of an inactive system has no obligations under state drinking water rules until the system becomes active.

## What are my obligations if my institution adds a chemical to the water?

If you regularly treat the municipal supply to your building, you are an **active** public water system with important legal obligations. You must:

- ◆ Collect required water quality samples and report results to state health officials. We will help you define the scope and frequency of your particular water quality sampling and reporting requirements.
- ◆ Notify your customers, using state-approved language and timeframes, when water quality does not meet standards.
- ◆ Employ a [certified waterworks operator](#) (applicable to most active water systems). We will inform you of any operator certification requirements that apply to your system.
- ◆ Operate and maintain the water system at all times consistent with the delivery of safe and reliable drinking water.
- ◆ Participate in a periodic inspection, known as a sanitary survey.
- ◆ Protect your water system from vandalism, damage and contamination.

To learn more about water system ownership and management obligations, see our publication [Owning and managing a drinking water system \(331-084\)](#).

## What should I do before I install treatment or an emergency source?

1. Call the nearest Office of Drinking Water regional office to learn about your engineering design and planning submittal requirements. See contact numbers below.
2. Hire a professional engineer licensed in Washington State to design the improvement(s), including treatment and source. For guidance, see [How to hire an engineer \(331-044\)](#).
3. Schedule and attend a “preplanning meeting” with the regional planner and regional engineer from the appropriate drinking water regional office that will be reviewing and approving the building water system.
4. Submit the design to us. You cannot start construction until we approve the design.

If you installed an emergency source or treatment without our approval, call our regional office. We will tell you what planning and engineering as-built documents you must submit for review and approval.

## Where can I get more information?

Our publications are online at [doh.wa.gov/ODWpubs](http://doh.wa.gov/ODWpubs). For more information, call the nearest drinking water regional office.

[Eastern Region](#): Spokane Valley 509-329-2100

[Northwest Region](#): Kent 253-395-6750

[Southwest Region](#): Tumwater 360-236-3030

[Headquarters Engineering](#): Tumwater 360-236-3131 or toll-free 800-521-0323